

KONAMI



SILENT HILL[®]

DYING INSIDE



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SILENT HILL: DYING INSIDE #2



WRITTEN BY **SCOTT CIENCIN** ART BY **BEN TEMPLESMITH**



LETTERING & DESIGN BY **ROBBIE ROBBINS** EDITED BY **KRIS OPRISKO** COVER BY **ASHLEY WOOD**



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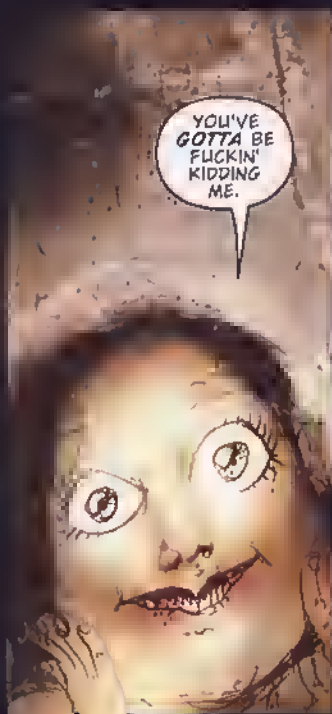
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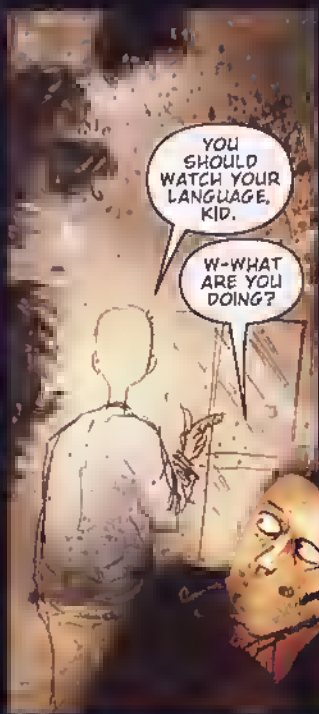
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I'M
WALKING
OUT OF
HERE.



YOU'VE
GOTTA BE
FUCKIN'
KIDDING
ME.



YOU
SHOULD
WATCH YOUR
LANGUAGE,
KID.

W-WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING?

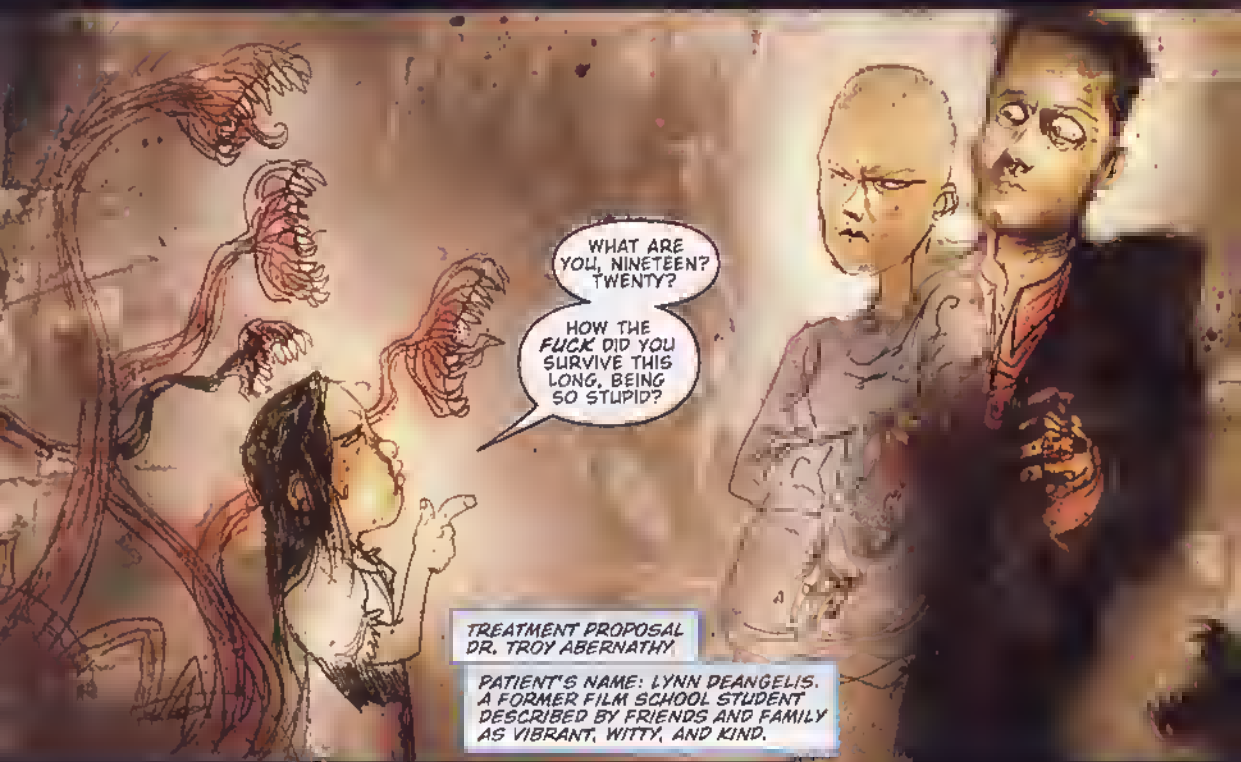


I GET IT
WE LET YOU
GO ONCE...



YAGHHH!!

...SO YOU
THINK WE WON'T
KILL YOU *THIS*
TIME.



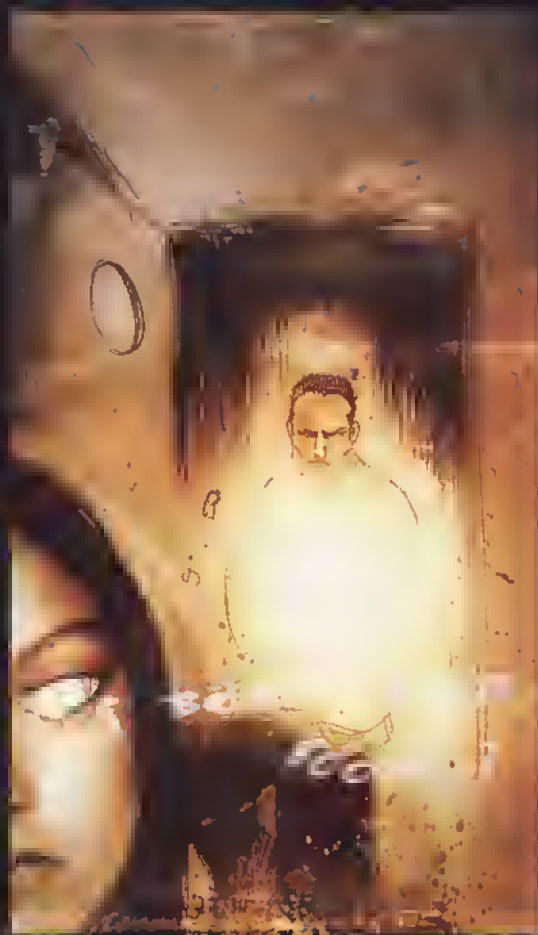
WHAT ARE
YOU, NINETEEN?
TWENTY?

HOW THE
FUCK DID YOU
SURVIVE THIS
LONG, BEING
SO STUPID?

TREATMENT PROPOSAL
DR. TROY ABERNATHY

PATIENT'S NAME: LYNN DEANGELIS.
A FORMER FILM SCHOOL STUDENT
DESCRIBED BY FRIENDS AND FAMILY
AS VIBRANT, WITTY, AND KIND.





PATIENT HAS
FAILED TO
RESPOND TO
ALL KNOWN
METHODS OF
TREATMENT,
INCLUDING
DRUG THERAPY.

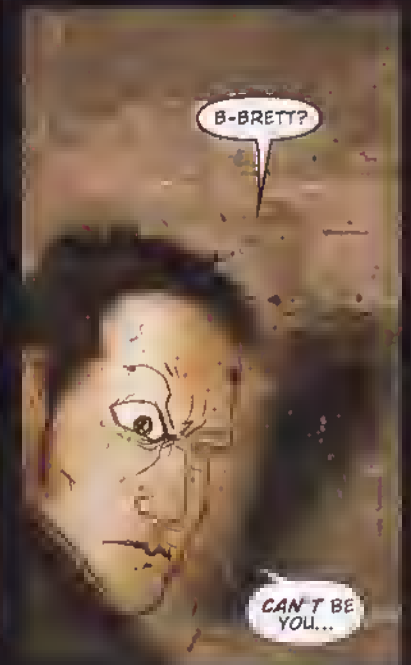


SHIT.



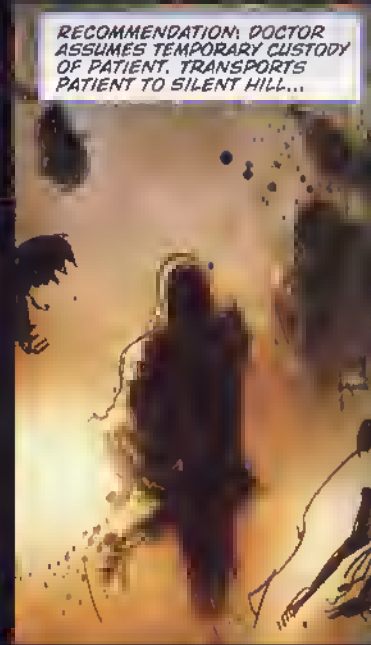
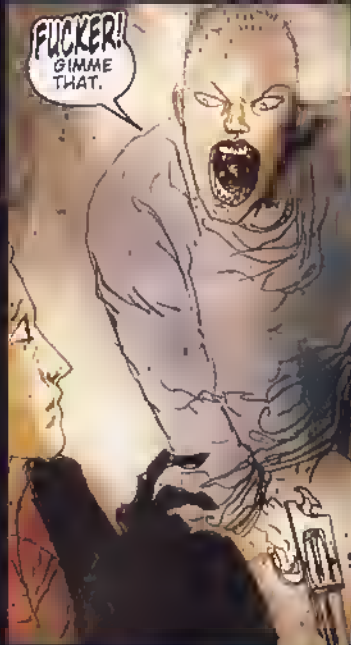
YOU... YOU
WERE IN MY
DREAM...

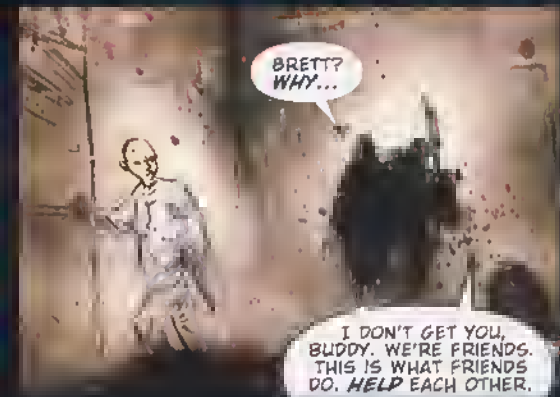
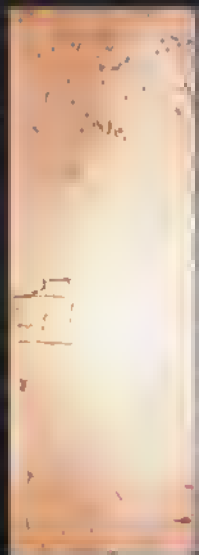
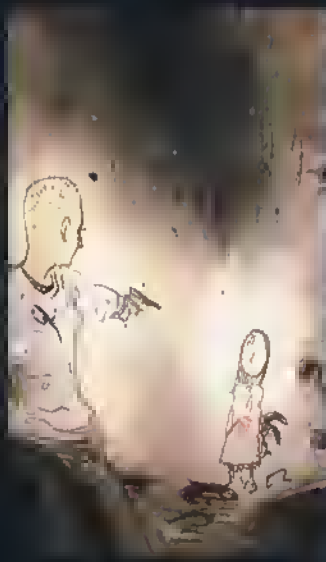
PATIENT FANTASIZES OF
"SHINING KNIGHT" SAVIOR
FIGURE. MISTAKENLY CASTS
ME IN THAT ROLE. SHE MUST
LEARN TO SAVE HERSELF.



B-BRETT?

CAN'T BE
YOU...





I DON'T GET YOU, BUDDY. WE'RE FRIENDS. THIS IS WHAT FRIENDS DO. *HELP* EACH OTHER.





SHIT,
WHERE ARE
MY MANNERS?
I'M BRETT. HE
AND TROY GO
WAY BACK.



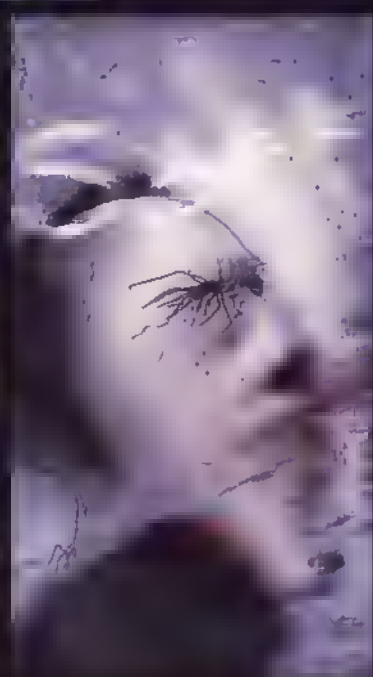
FUCKIN'
LEAVE HER
ALONE! DON'T
GO NEAR
HER!

OWWWW!



AMMO!
GRAB THE
AMMO,
TOO!

WHAT'D
YOU DO THAT
FOR?



AW DON'T
BE LIKE
THAT...

"...WE'RE NOT
DONE YET."

LEVIN ST.

D-DOCTOR...

ONLY ONE
BIRTH PLACE
USE PROTECTION

CALL ME
TROY.

TROY.

WHO WAS
THAT?

SHHH...

COME OUT AND
PLAY THE GAME
WAITING

GOTTA
FIND A WAY
OUT... A CAR
OR TRUCK,
BICYCLE,
ANYTHING...

FUCKIN'
ANSWER ME!
WHO WAS
THAT?

MY WIFE'S
FIRST HUSBAND.
HE... DID THINGS
TO HER.


HE WAS
DEAD. BUT IF
HE WAS ONE OF
THEM, WHY WAS
HE HELPING
US?

I DON'T
THINK HE
KNOWS.

KNOWS
WHAT?

A LOT OF
THINGS. LIKE
BEING DEAD. I
THINK THAT'S
ESCAPED HIM
AND—





WHY'D YOU
BRING ME BACK
HERE? I WARNED
YOU ABOUT SILENT
HILL. I **TOLD**
YOU.

YOU FUCKING
SON OF A BITCH

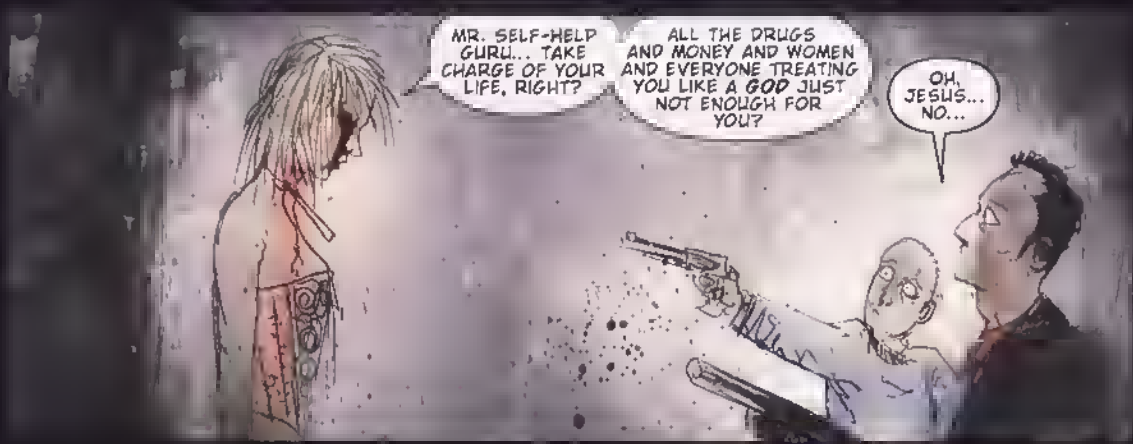
...TO HELP
YOU...

HE WANTS TO
HELP... THAT'S
SO SWEET... ISN'T
HE JUST ENOUGH
TO MAKE **ANY**
WIFE PROUD?

JULIANNA...

YOU KNOW,
CLOTHES SHOPPING
IS **STILL** A BITCH,
EVEN WHEN YOU'RE
DEAD.


BUT
ENOUGH ABOUT
MY PROBLEMS... POOR
TROY, ALWAYS WANTING
TO HELP... FEELING
GUILTY OVER LIVING THE
GOOD LIFE AFTER LITTLE
WIFEY WAS DEAD AND
ROTTING IN THE
GROUND.



MR. SELF-HELP
GURU... TAKE
CHARGE OF YOUR
LIFE, RIGHT?

ALL THE DRUGS
AND MONEY AND WOMEN
AND EVERYONE TREATING
YOU LIKE A GOD JUST
NOT ENOUGH FOR
YOU?

OH,
JESUS...
NO...



WHAT DO
YOU WANT,
TROY?

DO YOU
WANT ME TO
TELL YOU IT'S
OKAY? IT'S ALL
RIGHT?



IT'S
OKAY

IT'S ALL
RIGHT.

OH, HONEY,
I LOVE YOU SO
MUCH I COULD
JUST FLICKIN'
DIE.

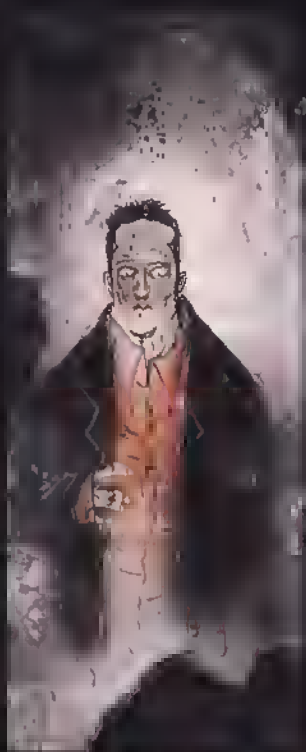
NO WAIT,
DID THAT.

YOUR
TURN.

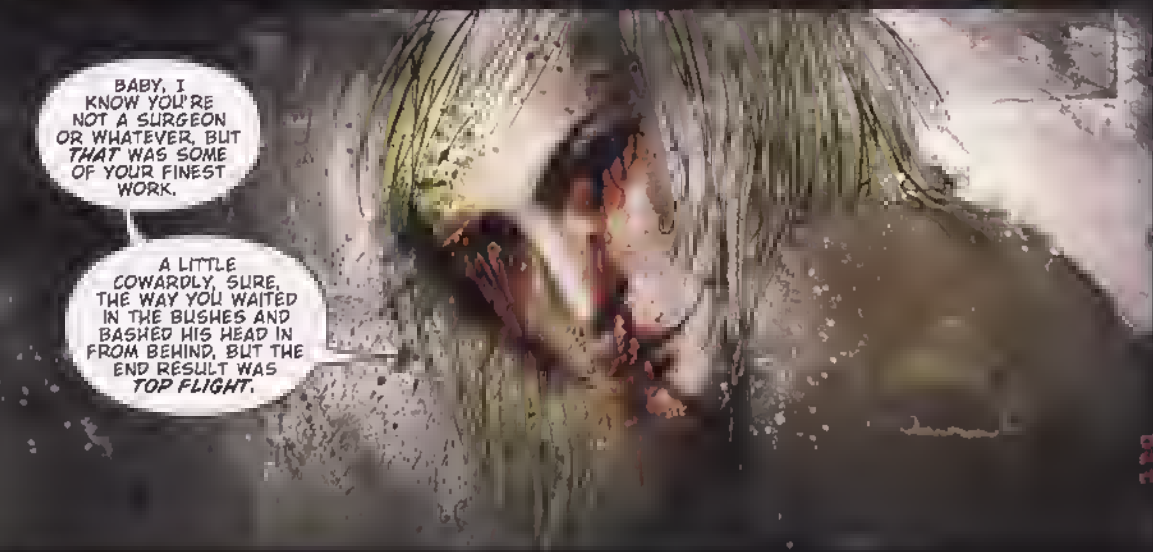


OH, GOD,
HONEY... WHY'D
YOU DO IT?
WHY'D YOU KILL
YOURSELF?

THERE'S
ANOTHER WAY
OUT. BACK
DOOR

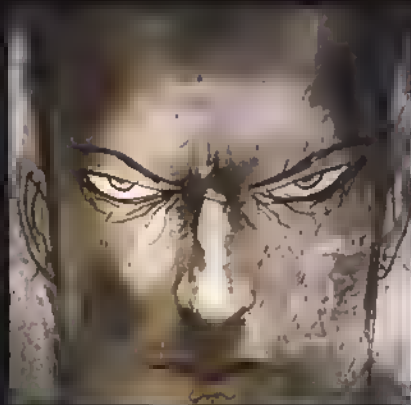


HEY, WHAT
WAS ALL THAT
WITH **BRETT** BEFORE,
ANYWAY? WAS THAT
THING WITH HIS **HEAD**
BOTHERING YOU,
SWEETIE?

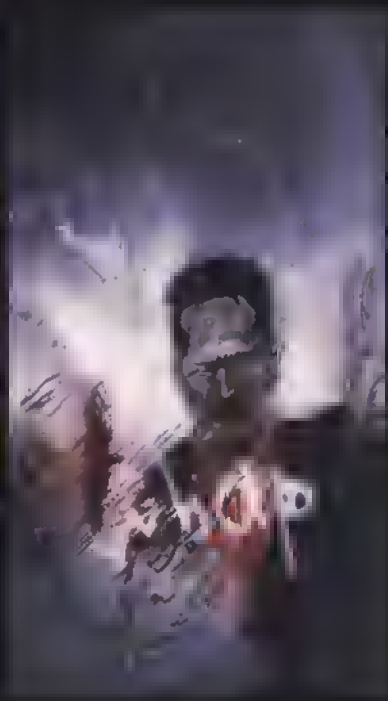


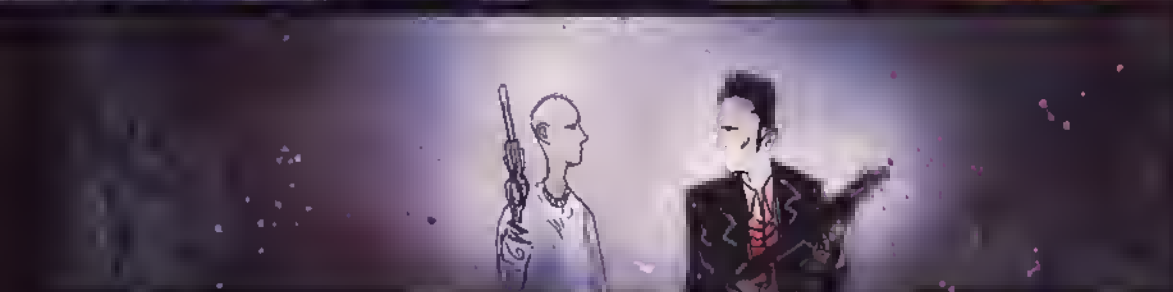
BABY, I
KNOW YOU'RE
NOT A SURGEON
OR WHATEVER, BUT
THAT WAS SOME
OF YOUR FINEST
WORK.

A LITTLE
COWARDLY, SURE,
THE WAY YOU WAITED
IN THE BUSHES AND
BASHED HIS HEAD IN
FROM BEHIND, BUT THE
END RESULT WAS
TOP FLIGHT.



LET'S GET
THE FUCK OUT
OF HERE





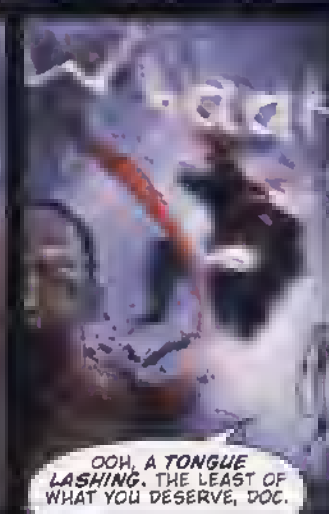
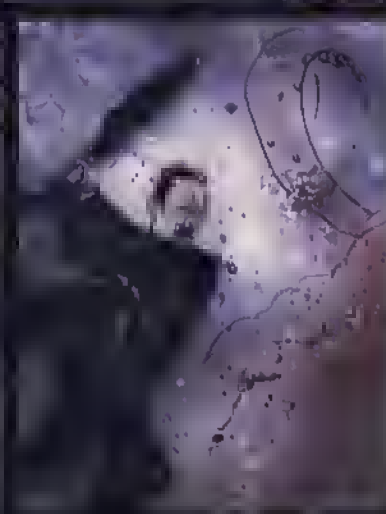






YOU HAVE A
NASTY MOUTH.
TIME TO SHUT IT,
I'M THINKING.

BRETT...
STUFF IT WITH
SOMETHING.



OOH, A TONGUE
LASHING. THE LEAST OF
WHAT YOU DESERVE, DOC.



SHHHH!
NOOOO!

WAIT!

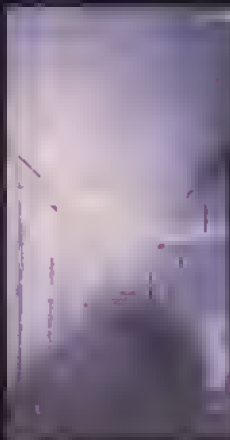
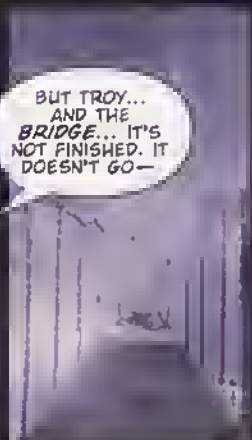
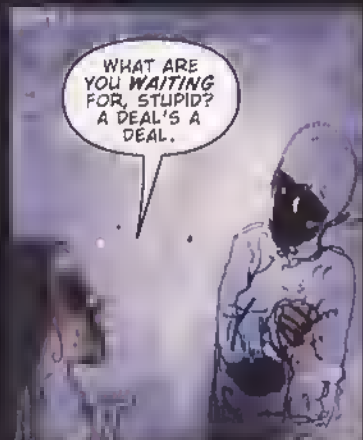
TAKE
ME.

YEAH
ABOUT
THAT...

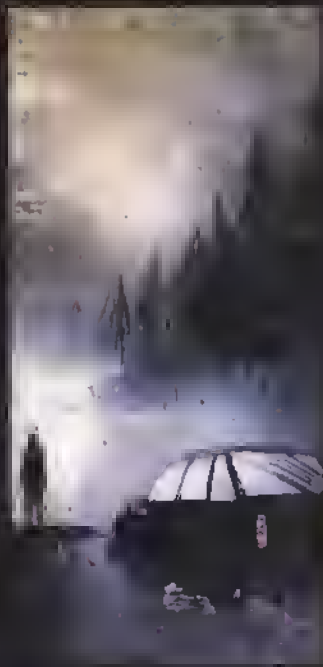
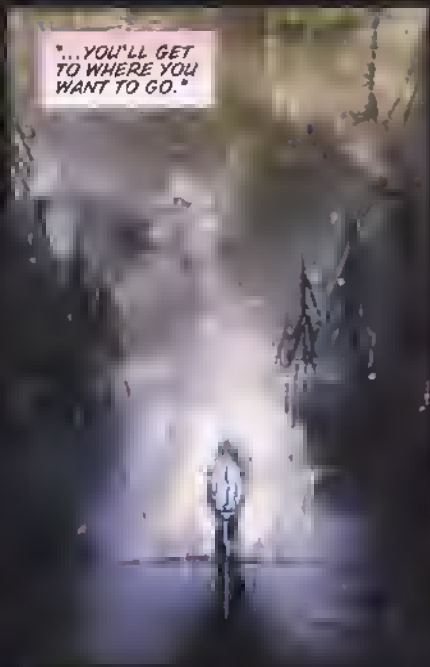


WE'VE
ALREADY
GOT YOU
FUCKER

YOU CAN
KILL ME, BUT
YOU CAN'T HAVE
ME. NOT BODY
AND SOUL.



"...YOU'LL GET
TO WHERE YOU
WANT TO GO."




NEED A RIDE?
WHERE ARE YOU
HEADING?

AS FAR
AWAY FROM
HERE AS I
CAN GET


HOP IN.





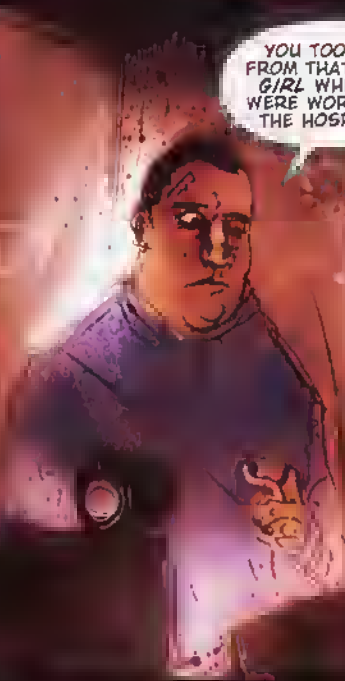


...WHILE YOU
STILL HAVE A
FACE



FUCKED UP...
IT'S LIKE *THEY'RE*
WATCHING US.


I LIKE
IT.



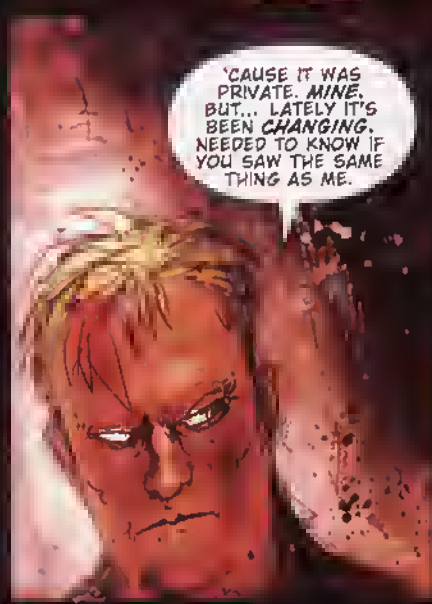
YOU TOOK THIS
FROM THAT *CRAZY*
GIRL WHEN YOU
WERE WORKING AT
THE HOSPITAL?




IT WAS
JUST LAYING
AROUND



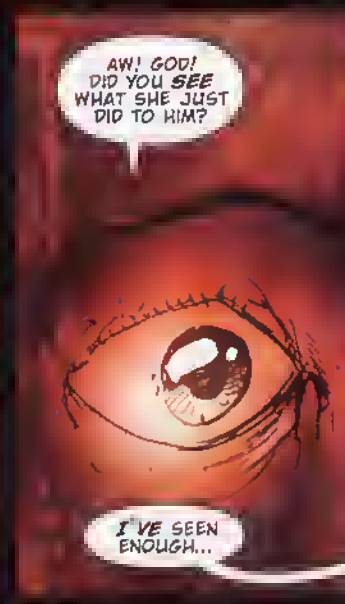
THAT WAS LIKE
A YEAR-AND-A-HALF
AGO! WHY DIDN'T
YOU EVER *SHOW* IT
TO US?



'CAUSE IT WAS
PRIVATE. *MINE*.
BUT... LATELY IT'S
BEEN *CHANGING*.
NEEDED TO KNOW IF
YOU SAW THE SAME
THING AS ME.



SHE WAS
THERE ON HER
OWN *BEFORE*. THE
RIDDLES ON THE
WALLS WERE
DIFFERENT, TOO.
AND—



AW! GOD!
DID YOU *SEE*
WHAT SHE JUST
DID TO HIM?

I'VE SEEN
ENOUGH...



...AND I
SAY PACK
YOUR BAGS,
PEOPLE.

WE'RE
GOING TO
SILENT HILL.

TO BE CONTINUED.

HIDDEN EXHIBITION

BY JOHN URBANICK

Under a pale sky, Paul retrieved the paper from the end of his driveway. The sun hung low in the west, streaking the horizon with rainbow colors, tinting the rest of the sky with violet.

He cupped a hand over his eyes to get a better, shaded look at the sunset. Quiet settled on the street, broken only by the thumping bass from a passing car.

When it was gone, Paul looked westward. The treetops were draped in silhouette, but moved and swayed like an ocean. Things, though no wind reached his driveway. Things—leaves!—leapt like dolphins in the ocean. He hesitated at his mailbox, confused, and then it hit him: birds. A whole flock, flying low over the trees and in his direction.

He withdrew the mail but didn't flip through it. His eyes never left the horizon. Paul hurried up the driveway. It felt odd, that so many birds should take flight at once.

The blanket of birds became more easily recognizable as they neared. He fumbled with his keys before getting the door open. The alarm buzzed, giving him sixty seconds to disengage it. After one last look at the approaching maelstrom of feathered beasts, Paul stepped inside and slammed the door.

The discolored sky bled into his house through large living room windows, but there was no other light. He tried a switch with no effect. Paul dropped his mail and paper on the kitchen table and picked up the phone. No dial tone. Of course not—a pole must have fallen, casualty of some careless driver making a right instead of a left.

Paul fished out his cell phone and speed-dialed Chris. The phone rang and rang, but she never answered.

Outside, the light faded fast, its sickly rim darkening to a bruised purple. Paul found his flashlight at the bottom of the pantry, but the batteries were weak when he turned it on. His own faith, he hadn't changed them. He kept spares in the hurricane kit—never could be too careful.

Five minutes later, no sunlight reached his windows but a thick, bright beam shone from his heavy-duty torch.

He swung the light across his kitchen and into the living room windows. Outside, the streetlamps were dark and a neighbor strolled around with a flashlight.

Paul went back outside. At the top of his walkway, he looked west. Trees were barely visible, a line of dark beneath ashen clouds still illuminated by an unseen sun. He reared in the middle of his driveway before he heard the sound.

It was a ticking, like fingers tapping on a desk—or beaks against windows. He turned around. Aup his roof, set against

the darkening sky, he saw the outlines of a hundred—a thousand—birds. A scream interrupted the night.

It came from across the street: his neighbor. By the time Paul turned, he only saw the flashlight rolling down the driveway. Its blade of light revealed bushes, lawn gnomes, and the spray of a sprinkler before settling on the empty street.

The first bird struck the back of Paul's head hard enough to throw him to the ground. It was like ratcheting a wild pitch on his skull. His flashlight went out as he dropped it, but white arcs flashed across his vision. His head lifted. A lot. The bird—a falcon, he could tell by the hood it wore—landed on the driveway.

Paul managed to get to his knees before a second falcon smashed the side of his face. He saw it at the last moment, diving with breathtaking speed. He may unconsciously before hitting the ground.

* * *

An hour earlier

Somewhere underneath the Louvre

"We shouldn't be here," Jean said, but his trembling, whispery voice carried no weight.

"Of course we shouldn't," Tara agreed. She, too, kept her voice low, but she followed the flashlight beam through the wire, dark corridors. Here, the museum stored its unseen treasures. They kept the good stuff down here. Of course, they displayed the Mona Lisa—she was famous, not necessarily good.

She expected to find something incredible, set aside decades ago by a curator who didn't know as much as he thought, a single object (or perhaps a room of artifacts) no one had laid eyes upon since before Tara's birth.

Jean followed closely. They'd gone several levels beneath the actual museum, lower than the entrance where the Metin deposited tourists. Tara kept him, her guide, because he had the keys she needed. He didn't work here; with the tiny skull earring and the dragon tattoo, he barely even looked French. He must have been the product of a doomed cross between a Chinese warrior woman and a New Orleans transsexual prostitute, born under the full moon at the height of Mardi Gras. He was strong and sexy and never ran out of those thin brown cigarettes, but the deeper Tara brought him, the less alluring he seemed.

The constant glances over his shoulders, the nervousness in his voice contrasted with the sculpted muscles and howling

features. For Tara, it had been a good couple of nights, but she'd drop him after this expedition.

Tara didn't intend to steal anything. She just wanted to see it. These were the secrets. She just wanted to see them.

At least he didn't talk much.

These corridors were at least as large as those upstairs—one, two hundred yards in any direction—because the darkness simply swallowed her light before it reached any walls. The first halls had been cluttered with crates and old desks. A few had been recently used, maybe only minutes earlier. That was when Jean's composure first wavered. But Tara expected to find no one; nearly midnight, it was time for those overly proper scientists to hit the Lido or the Crazy Horse and get plastered.

Deeper, the corridors were just as wide but not as tall, and with that last set of stairs (steep, rough, littered by stone chips and dust, and very narrow), the clutter was gone. It would be difficult to carry an Italian statue down here, and impossible for some of larger seventeenth century canvases. No, this must be the home of the most valuable, hand-sized relics. Maybe Tara would take home a souvenir after all.

Except for a lot of cobwebs and a few empty boxes, this hall disappointed her. There was one desk, under layers of dust. There were papers inside its top drawer, and an old, leather ledger, but everything was in fancy French script. Tara didn't have the patience to wait for Jean's interpretations.

"There's nothing else here," Jean said after a five-minute spell of silence. Tara ignored him. Her flashlight beam fell on an alcove to their left. It recessed only a few feet from the wall, with an old, wooden door. If it was locked, Tara doubted Jean's ill-gotten keys would open it.

The knob turned easily, but the door was heavy. A wooden bar had been used to lock it, from her side. "Open this," Tara said, standing aside.

With a sigh, Jean stepped forward. He shimmed the plank out of its rusty, finger-like holders, and dropped it beside the door. It echoed. Tara killed the light, listening for any sound that might follow. There were no alarms, no footsteps, only Jean's heavy breaths.

"Go on," she said.

He yanked the door open. Tara stepped around him, entering the room, and switched on the flashlight.

A wave of claustrophobia almost shook her off her feet. The ceiling was so low, she could stand on her toes and bump her head. The walls on either side were tight, wide enough for maybe two men. The back wall was only twice as deep, making a perfect rectangle.

She swept her light across the bare walls, the undisturbed grime on the floor...

...and found the jars. Four of them. The nearest, with a falcon head, was right next to her. Tara bent, wiped some of the dust away, and lifted the jar.

Jean slipped back into French. "Soigneux!" Usually, she hated that. She'd asked him to speak English around her, translate when necessary—she didn't know enough French to order a croissant—but Tara's attention was completely on the canopic jar.

"Which one is this?" she asked, not expecting Jean to know the answer. "Heart? Brain?"

After a moment, Jean said, "I don't think they saved either of those."

Tara sighed. He was probably right.

What she'd thought had been loose pebbles on the ground were tiny statuettes. They were wood and stone and something like pottery, scattered without the care put into actual Egyptian burial chambers. These figurines—shabtis—represented royal servants who would continue in their duties on the other side.

Didn't that mean there was a mummy nearby?

Slowly, Tara arced her light across the entire room, searching every possible inch for signs of another doorway, steps, a ladder, anything that might lead into another room. "Maybe it's secret," she said, shoving the flashlight into the crook of her arm so she could run her fingers along the wall. Like in *Dungeons & Dragons*. She wondered, briefly, if finding the hidden doorway would trigger some ancient Egyptian trap—but this was Paris.

She stepped to the side, around one of the other jars—a jackal head on this one—and felt more of the wall. The light slid under her arm. She moved to catch it, losing hold of the falcon jar. Trying not to drop that, she also lost the flashlight. Both shattered.

Jean cursed. In French. Tara jumped aside as shards bounced against her ankle. One of the statuettes cracked under her shoes. And someone—not Jean, and certainly not Tara—inhaled deeply.

There was a flutter of wings. A deep, scratched voice, said something—probably more curses—in an ancient language. Involuntarily, Tara held her breath. Every muscle tensed as she tried, desperately, to remain motionless. Her pulse throbbed in her throat.

Jean cursed again, stepping sideways or backwards into the wall with a dull thud. The newcomer fell silent. The darkness was overwhelming. A scratching sound broke the silence, like tiny claws clicking on stone.

Tara wanted to flee; this was not like running into a security guard. It was like running into a Mummy in an old black and white film. But there hadn't been anything like that here; this was not Cairo.

A hand grabbed her forearm. It felt dry, brittle, yet impossibly strong. It was too late for escape. His voice reverberated in her mind, rooting through the deepest layers. She tried to pull away; he tightened his fingers. Every bit of knowledge he extracted from her brain left a blinding, white pain in its place, and an echo of what had been there. Tara flailed her free arm, stomped her feet, and screamed and screamed and screamed...

He released her arm. She collapsed, cracking her jaw on the ground. Waves of agony rippled in her mind. Worse, he showered the room with an unreal and painful white light, which oozed across every surface and stole all the shadows. On the floor, Tara saw only his bare, unbandaged feet, dark and seared.

He hissed, eventually forming words in English: "It is a different world now."

A large bird, mostly black—a falcon?—landed on the ground in front of Tara's face. It looked down at her, as a baroness might upon an urchin. Its eyes were smart, focused, and its beak seemed to grin.

"Horus," she said, the effort of speech easier than she expected. The scalding in her head was diminishing, slowly. She couldn't see clearly beyond the bird, but was sure Jean had fled. She would have, too, had she gotten the chance.

The working parts of her mind pieced together a quick puzzle: falcon, Egypt, Horus—the god of life. That connection should have calmed her.

* * *

Jean ran.

He really had no other choice. When the light burst from the naked man's palm (like needles driving through Jean's eyes), he'd seen all he needed to: the American girl on the floor, a dozen birds perched on the man's shoulders, head, and the ground around his feet.

When Tara had screamed, he'd thought it was because of the sudden dark. But seeing the man, Jean knew this was no Lotvire scientist. This was something she'd unleashed, like a curse that would plague all of Paris.

So as he ran, Jean was very aware that plague followed in his wake.

He reached the narrow stairs, threw himself up two at a time (they were too steep to go higher). He never heard the bird until it hit him, like a bullet in the back of the head. It threw him forward, smashed his head against the stone wall. He rebounded and toppled backwards. Light spilled from the alcove and rounded the corners, and a dozen birds disappeared up that staircase before his vision blackened.

He might have been passed out for a day or a moment. His head ached on both sides. The unnatural light receded, drawing back to its source—the ancient thing Tara had awakened!

As if in answer to his thoughts, he heard her voice: "Horus." He'd been through the exhibits upstairs often enough to know he was one of the Egyptian gods. Which one, why, what his story was... Jean knew none of that.

Then the light was gone.

Okay, relax, he told himself. You brought the girl here because you thought it'd be cool to show off the unseen parts of your city. You duped your old man's keys months ago; no one would ever know how she got in. And this Egyptian thing... if it's not some drug the American slipped in your drink, then you banged your head a long time ago. Definitely.

There was no other explanation.

Jean used the dank wall to steady himself as he rose to his feet. Damn, the things he'd do for a pretty girl.

Standing again, Jean looked from the stairs to the alcove. It was useless; not even a cat's eyes could pierce this dark. But he had to choose: go back for the girl (the pretty American girl and an Egyptian god, neither of whom belonged here) or flee (up the stairs, and more stairs, to the Metro and on the next train home). His head whirled, indecision aggravated by queasiness.

Go back for the girl. It was bravado, or masochistic tendencies, but he couldn't leave her. He didn't know, for certain,

that there was any danger. So, a bird beamed him. What was it doing down here in the first place?

Jean stumbled, lost his balance, and went down again. This time, the world—and even the darkness, vanished for a long while.

* * *

On the screen: a serious face, eyes shifting as he read the teleprompter. Perhaps a skeletal crew kept the news running, or the crisis hadn't reached the studio yet.

"...like a wave across the world. The earth spins, the sun sets, and dusk brings out the birds. Predatory birds, often trained. Falcons, long used by hunters, have congregated and, as an army, attacked. There's no order. While Paris, France, was first to feel the siege, the attacks have occurred anywhere but not everywhere. No reports from New York City, yet all contact has been lost with Buffalo except for a live traffic feed we've managed to tap into..."

The voice continued, but the image shifted to a wide road filled with unmoving cars. Windows were shattered, blood splattered, and bodies strewn across hoods, open doors, and all around the street. An innumerable number of birds either perched on any available surface, inanimate or dead, or flew solo across the screen. Fortunately, the grainy picture obscured most details.

"...praying that dawn will bring some relief to the affected areas. The number of deaths here, alone, has been conservatively estimated at three thousand..."

* * *

Eventually, the pain subsided enough for Tara to sit up, albeit unsteadily. She felt the ground around her, searching for her flashlight, hoping it still worked. A shard from the canopic jar nicked her finger, drawing blood. She ignored it, too panicked to care about a scratch. She pushed aside several of the figurines, touched one of the other, intact jars (God, what if she broke another?), and finally found the thin plastic cylinder. She thumbed the switch. A narrow beam burst forward through a broken lens. The bulb, miraculously, had survived the fall.

Horus had closed the door when he left. She hoped he hadn't locked it, entombing her. Only the shabtis and three jars shared her cell.

The headrush from trying to stand dropped Tara flat on her back. She closed her eyes, extinguishing the light to preserve the batteries. She didn't want to lose her light. Who knew how long it would take to find her way back to the surface alone?

After an eternity, Tara crawled to the door. She reached up to open it, frustrated at the resistance. She slumped forward, leaning against the heavy wood, telling herself it wouldn't budge because of its weight and not because a look condemned her to starve or suffocate. In a few more minutes, she'd regain enough strength to let herself out.

Had she triggered a curse? How many Egyptian gods were rumored to carry out their curses? She didn't know enough about mythology to guess. But he had been Horus; the falcon head on the canopic jar and the birds indicated that much. He could have thanked her for releasing him.

Maybe leaving her alive was drunks.

Tara had to stop her line of thinking. She swore off human films.

It didn't help.

Eventually she cried again. The door moved, a little at first, and finally all the way. She fell, again, but gasped as if she'd already been suffocating.

She crawled completely out of the room, glad to leave it behind. She switched on the light and swung it in either direction. The far ends of the hall were too distant, but she saw no sign of Hums. No one. Except for her ragged breathing, there wasn't a sound.

She tested against the side of the wide hall while she caught her breath. She shouldn't have been that badly hurt. He'd taken something from her—information, knowledge, language and such—ripped it out, but leaving it at the same time.

Or so she hoped. In the dark, she raised her voice only as high as a whisper: "I'm still here."

No echo came back. But she believed her words.

With a deep breath and a murmured effort, Tara pulled herself up the wall and in her feet. Yes, she could do this. On back the way she came.

She found Jean at the staircase. He lay on the ground, one foot hanging on the edge of the first step, blood oozed on his forehead.

He wasn't still bleeding, though, and it didn't look bad. She knelt, leaning close to hear if he was breathing. If not, it was her fault; she'd left him here. But he was breathing, and better than she was. "Jean?" she whispered, tapping his shoulder.

Groggily, he opened his eyes. A weak smile cracked his lips, but his gaze was dull and unfocused.

"Jean," she said again, more insistently.

"Jean," he said in his thickest accent, enunciating her mispronunciation.

"Yes, Jean," Tara said. "Are you okay?" It was a stupid question, yes, because obviously neither of them was entirely okay.

"Oui," he said, nuzzling lightly.

"English," she reminded him.

"Yes," he said, and then more strongly. "Yes." He nudged his forehead, came away with a drop of blood. "Mine?"

"Yours," she said. She helped him sit up. There was a bump on the back of his head where the blood matted his hair. She didn't touch it, didn't bring his attention to it. A torn hunk of skin hung just above the nape of his neck.

"We shouldn't be here," he said.

"No," Tara said, nuzzling in full agreement. "On y va."

He gave a short, clipped laugh, and said, "English, please."

A moment later, they heard something break—shattering—something like the canopic jar Tara had already opened.

The sound came from the room. She and Jean, and the beam from her flashlight, looked toward it. Whispering followed, multiple voices. Then a naked man crept into the hall and strode toward them, muscles rippling through his body.

Tara almost dropped the light. He was another god, straight out of Egypt, no more human than the birds. When he paused to look down at them, Tara kept the beam aimed at his face. Anger lit his eyes. His jaw was tightly set, teeth ground

together. He spoke, obviously asking a question, but in a language Tara couldn't understand.

She shook her head, lightly, afraid he might scar through her brain like the last god. "I don't understand."

His lips twisted into a sneer, and then he went into the spiral staircase.

Until that moment, Tara hadn't realized she'd been holding her breath. It, and all her remaining energy, came out in a rush, and she passed out.

She woke in chains.

* * *

The first night

Los Angeles

Sunser brought the falcans to the Sunset Strip, and soon the streets ran red. One girl, an old-timer at twenty-two, took refuge in a garbage dumpster. The birds found her anyway.

Dawn found her badly picked apart, strewn about like spaghetti.

The second day

Buckingham Palace

By noon, there had been no changing of the guards; there were none in relieve.

The third night

Prague

It took six centuries to build St. Vitus Cathedral. The falcans rested here during the day. By dusk, the survivors (for this city had been struck at least as hard as Paris) sealed the cathedral and began to knock it down. By hand.

Before dawn, the Gothic cathedral had been reduced to smoldering rubble with a scattering of human and bird carcasses.

The fourth night

China

Monks meditated in the open air. Half their brethren had been slaughtered in the initial attack. More died every night. Presently, a contingent of falcans perched on rooftops and atop the temple.

The fifth night

New York City

The subways stopped running shortly before midnight. Until then, a few lines had kept at it, making their stops and picking up passengers.

But the number of human passengers dwindled. It was only a matter of time before the falcans broke into the drivers' booths.

Only a half dozen of the trains collided with each other (in ran past the ends of their line). Few were wounded. Most people who were still alive had found holes in the city.

The sixth night

Singapore

By this time, buildings had collapsed throughout the world. Rescue efforts were abandoned every nightfall, and the falcans came in to pick at those still trapped within the rubble.

A seven-year-old girl held her breath rather than cry as the birds uncharacteristically ripped the eyeballs out of her still living mother, her legs crushed under a ton of concrete and steel.

The seventh night Caribbean

An ocean liner, out for the ninth night of a four day cruise, thought they had escaped the wrath of the birds. News reports were scarce. Telephones, ship-to-shore, wireless, and satellite all failed. Sporadic access to the Internet turned up pictures of burning fields in Kansas, huge utility poles toppled outside Kyoto, and the ruins of Moscow.

The falcons came like a huge black cloud. The crew killed the engines and all the lights, hoping the murderous flock would pass over them, but the birds boarded with a vengeance.

By dawn, the ship drifted at sea, an explainable victim of the Bermuda Triangle.

The eighth night

The birds did not come. The falcons had ceased attacking in such massive numbers. Scattered assaults were reported in rural areas, and one pit bull in Albuquerque was bashed to death by a solo assailant. But for the most part, people found it a little easier to breathe.

• • •

"Jean?" Tara whispered. In desperation: "Horus? Anyone?"

The little men stepped over and around her, ignoring her pleas. They spoke amongst themselves, but their tiny voices were impossible to make out. She had awakened here, trapped in darkness and almost alone. A long time passed before she realized they weren't insects crawling across her chained legs and torso.

They were people, Figorines, maybe an inch tall at most; the shabti's. They had broken the second jar, freeing that second god. Two jars remained.

Her little adventure had failed.

She wished she could see the shabti's and what they did. Was Jean also in this room, chained but less conscious? Was she so far removed from reality that she imagined the feet crawling over her, tickling her breasts and thighs so uncomfortably? Maybe she slept in a hospital. That would be better. Because images of birds, falcons—ravaging, hungrily feeding upon her friends, family, total strangers—kept flashing through her mind. She hoped the images were delusions.

Finally, finally, she heard heavy footsteps belonging to someone of regular height and weight. He carried a torch; even as he approached the doorway, the flickering red light threw frantic shadows around its corners. She strained to see him, confined by chains across her neck, waist, and limbs. "Jean? Jean, is that you?"

Tara averted her eyes from the shabti's, who were suddenly a lot less active and standing all around (even all over her) with their gazes fixed on the door. She shook herself, trying to

knock a few off her stomach, and was rewarded with nausea and dizziness.

Next to her head was a small bowl. She hadn't seen it before; from here, they'd been giving her water (not enough to keep her from feeling like she was dying of thirst). There'd been no food. She didn't know if she had the strength to stand. She might have chewed the shabti's themselves if they ever crossed over her mouth.

The second god stepped into the room, torch in hand. He was no longer naked, but dressed in a fine Parisian suit. He carried an old wooden box, presumably something else from these unseen museum stores.

"My uncle has been stopped," he said.

The shabti's erupted into applause, sounding not too drastically different than static. The god set the box next to Tara, and then gathered the two canopic jars that remained intact.

"You freed my uncle," he said in perfect English.

Tara closed her eyes. She didn't know Egyptian mythology. "I freed Horus?" she asked. "The falcon god?"

"I am Horus," he said, leaning close. "You released my uncle. Serh."

"Oh." It meant nothing to Tara.

"I have contained him, again," Horus said, "but at a great price. And thusly, you shall pay." He withdrew what appeared to be scalpels and other surgical equipment from the box.

Tara tried to pull away, still finding no leeway in the chains. Horus set the cold equipment on Tara's belly. She couldn't shake them off.

Horus gathered the shards from the other two jars. With a passing of his hand he repaired the pieces, making them complete once more.

"One," he said, "held my uncle." He set the four jars around Tara and cracked their seals. "In one, I waited." He picked up the tools. "The other two were empty. Diversions." He pressed the cold blade against her stomach "Had any been opened, my shabti's were to awaken and be sure I awoke. As they did. But of the four you could have opened, you chose wrong." The blade split her skin easily, forging a burning trail. "First your stomach," he said, touching the jackal head top of one of the open jars.

• • •

Tara's screams would have gone unheard, except Jean waited in the next room, chained to the floor. Horus had already spoken with him. "You two shall share a fate." He opened a wooden box in his hands to show Jean sharp, ancient surgical equipment—or torture tools. "As the woman opened the jar, she shall be first."

As Tara screamed—a sound that went on for innumerable hours—two falcons and a dozen shabti's settled on Jean's chest. The claws scratching his skin were just a prelude to what was to come.

He no longer heard Tara's screams over his own.

THE END